



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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A Practical Exposition Upon The Fifty-Third Chapter Of Isaiah.

by Thomas Manton

VERSE ONE.

*Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?—Isa.
53:1.*

I SHALL in the course of this exercise go over the several verses of this chapter, which is an eminent portion of scripture, and calls for most serious attention. It may rather be called the *gospel* than the *prophecy* of Isaiah. It contains so ample and clear a discovery of Jesus Christ, that one would rather account it historical than prophetic. Other prophecies are explained by the history of Christ in the New Testament, but this prophecy explains the history; there is no chapter so often quoted and vouched by Christ and the apostles as this, viz., no less than seven or eight times in the New Testament. It is so full and clear, that it rather needs meditation than a comment, faith more than learning, to conceive of it. The coherence or connection of this with the former chapter, take briefly thus —The evangelical prophet (for so he may justly be called) had in the end of the former chapter spoken, of the glory of Christ's kingdom, how readily it should be entertained among the Gentiles, how he should 'sprinkle many nations,' and make 'kings to shut their mouths,' that is, with silence hearken to and consider his doctrine. Here, coming to the Jews, he finds, on the contrary, nothing but contempt and scorn, and therefore in an holy admiration cries out, 'Who hath believed our report?' He saw it was not believed in his days, and that it would not in after days. It was in vain to speak to them of the Messiah. In this chapter there are three remarkable parts:—1. A description of the Jews' horrid unbelief and contumacy against Christ, ver. 1.

2. The occasion, and ground of, that unbelief, viz., Christ's meanness as to outward show and appearance, from ver. 2 to 10.

3. The removal of this occasion, and taking off this scandal and prejudice, by showing the fruit and glory that followed this meanness, ver. 11 to the end of the chapter.

Our text is the first of these, containing a pathological description of the Jews' contempt and rejection of Christ. It is propounded by way of query, in two questions.

1st. The one holds forth the thing or evil itself by way of admiration: 'Who hath believed our report?'

2dly. The other, the cause of it: 'To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?'

1st. In the first there is considerable: the person, *who*; the act, *believed*; the object, *report*.

That the words are a question is clear, but what kind of question is not so clear. Some understand the words as a commiseration of the prophet: *q. d.*, *I am to tell you such things of the sufferings of the Messiah, that you will scarce believe men should be so barbarous toward him. But this is so absurd that it needs no confutation. It is not a question of commiseration, but of admiration, or rather of complaint, in which Isaiah' applies himself to God, as the Septuagint shows by putting in the word **Kurie**, Lord, being herein followed by St Paul, Rom. 10:16, 'For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?' So John 12:38, it is also said, 'Lord, who hath believed our report?'*

But let us come to the parts of it. *Who*? Though the inquiry be general, it is not to intimate that none, but only that very few did believe, or think there was any truth in what was spoken. Then for the object, *our report*, understand it concerning Christ; or, as the LXX. express it, *ath akoh hmw*, 'our hearing,' that is, what they hear from us. The Jews are guilty here of a double lie in wresting this place; they say it means the report concerning their own misery and succeeding glory, as if Israel were spoken of here under the notion of one common person; and they transfer the evil complained of from themselves to the Gentiles. But the sense is this: There are very few that will hearken to those things that we are to tell them concerning the Messiah; they will seem riddles and contradictions to them, that there should be such glory in things so vile and ignoble to outward appearance.

2dly. For the reason: 'To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' As if the prophet had said, Therefore they do not believe, because the arm of the Lord is not revealed. Here is some difficulty about what is meant by 'the arm of the Lord,' which, without question, is metaphorical. Some take it for the counsel and

contrivance of God effected and brought to pass; as Acts 4:28, ‘Whatsoever thy hand (or arm) and counsel determined to be done.’ It is more properly taken for the strength of God: you know the arm is the chiefest receptacle of strength. But what strength of God? Some understand it of the gospel, which is called ‘the power of God to salvation,’ Rom. 1:16; the gospel is not revealed to them. So 1 Cor. 1:18, ‘The preaching of the cross’ is called ‘the power of God,’ because of that admirable virtue and success which accompanied the preaching of it. Some by the power of God understand the power of God with Christ. He did miracles, and yet they would not see the arm of the Lord. They thought he cast out devils by Beelzebub, as if it were by the power of Satan, not of God. Some by ‘arm’ understand Christ himself, who, 1 Cor. 1:24, is called ‘the power and wisdom of God;’ he is the power, the arm, the right hand of the Father. There is no great work of God but is done in and by Christ, as a man doth his work by his arm; as in making the world, vanquishing his enemies, delivering his church, it is everywhere spoken of as done by Christ. Others by ‘arm’ understand the power of the Spirit in and by the ordinances. I rather prefer that of the gospel, together with the Spirit.

Then for *revealed*, you will say the gospel was revealed to the Jews. I answer—There is a double revelation. First, Common, which is nothing else but the promulgation of the gospel; this must be to every creature. Secondly, Proper and special, to the elect, by the Spirit. There is the Spirit’s revelation, and the prophet’s revelation. The meaning is: To whom hath the Spirit of God revealed that what I speak is true? To whom is the power of God to salvation inwardly manifested and made known by the Spirit? Implying they will not believe without this manifestation.

Thus you have the meaning of the words. I shall offer to your thoughts some occasional observations before I come to the main points.

From the Jews wresting this text, observe:—

1. That there is an evil disposition in men to turn off upon others that which nearly concerns themselves. Men are good at making false applications, and turn off that to others which the word and Spirit intend to them. When Christ had spoken to Peter, it is said, ‘Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith to Jesus, Lord, What shall this man do?’

2. Observe, that it is no new thing in persons to vouch that for themselves which makes most against them. Thus the Jews do this chapter against the Gentiles. So that which you find written, 1 Cor. 14:16, ‘How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen?’ the papists vouch it for Latin service, though it is the drift of the apostle to condemn it. Let not the like

usage in our time amaze you, when Antinomians and Socinians urge those texts for them that are really against them.

3. Observe this too: When God, for the wickedness of a people, hardeneth their hearts, they are apt to mistake in that which is most plain. A man would think that this chapter should work upon a Jew if anything could; so you wonder why men are not wrought upon by such powerful persuasions which speak very home to them. The reason is, God hath hardened them, Rom. 11:7.

4. From the prophet's great admiration, observe, that when we can do no good upon a people, the most effectual way is to complain of it to God. He can help us and them too; this will stop murmuring. The mind is eased of that burden that lies heavy on us, when we can go and report the case to God, and pour out our complaints into his bosom. Other of God's messengers besides Isaiah have great cause to say, 'Who hath believed our report?'

5. Observe, that those that profess the name of God may be much prejudiced against the entertainment of those truths and counsels that he makes known to them for their good.

6. That it is a wonder they should not believe so plain a discovery of Christ, though by the just judgment of God they did not.

7. That the first believing of Christ is a believing the report of him; but afterwards there are experiences to confirm our belief. The soul then knoweth that there is a Christ, and that there is mercy in him 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' John 4:42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know indeed that he is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

I come now to the main points which I shall prosecute.

First, That there may be a glorious report of Jesus Christ, and yet few believe it. Or—

That Jesus Christ may be clearly represented to a people, and yet but few won to believe in him.

Secondly, That the gospel is the arm and power of God, or word of righteousness. Though it is an uncredited report to the world, yet it is the arm and power of God to them that believe.

Thirdly, Therefore so few believe, because God's arm is not revealed to them: the power of the word is not manifested by the Spirit.

I. As to the first of these points, other truths may be delivered and not closed with, but it is a wonder that so sweet a truth as this should not be received. The wonder is so much the greater if we look upon

1. The persons making this report: The prophets of old time, the apostles in Christ's time, the ministers of the gospel now-a-days—men that, if you look upon them singly, did deserve some reverence and esteem—men that gave forth abundant declarations that God was with them, and spoke by them, who were as polished shafts in God's quiver. Then consider them speaking the same thing, all proclaiming the same Christ; that is more. For I conceive there is an emphasis in this *our report*—not *my*, but *our*; or, as Zachariah, John's father, said, Luke 1:70, 'As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.' Though there were many holy prophets, yet they had but one mouth, they spake as if with one mouth: 'Who hath believed our report?'

2. The persons to whom the report is made: A professing people, a people that were nurtured and taught this from their infancy and youth, by all the ceremonies of their religion, leading them to that Christ whom the prophets did more distinctly reveal to them. They had been tutored and taught this lesson for many hundred years by the pedagogy of the law; for so that place is to be expounded, Gal. 3:24, 'The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.' The ceremonial law may properly be called ***paidagwgoVeiVCpiston***, or the dispensation of Moses. Yet 'who hath believed our report?' 3. The manner how it is reported: Distinctly, plainly, though in

prophetical expressions, by Isaiah and Jeremiah, God gave some *praeludia*; some clear expressions were then used by all the prophets. Though they had not noonshine, they had the dawning of the day, light enough to see the day approaching. Had it been such a dark intimation as that of the seed of the woman breaking the serpent's head, it had been the less wonder if they had not weighed it, because they could not so distinctly have conceived it. But when all is made so clear, the wonder is the greater that they should not consider it.

I shall prove the point by distinguishing the several times in which there have been any glorious discovery of Jesus Christ, and show you that in all these times the company of believers have been few. *Distinque tempora, et exis bonus theologus* (By distinguishing the times, you show yourself a good theologian). The way to understand the reason of it, is to find out what have been the main prejudices against Christ in the several times of his revelation. I shall name four times:—(1.) The prophets' time; (2.) John Baptist's time; (3.) That of Christ's life; (4) Our time; or the time of the first promulgation of the gospel.

1. The prophets' time, when the number of believers was few. They had all some loose and general expectation of a Messiah, but few believed, at least not in such a Messiah as the prophet prophesied of.

[1.] Because of the grossness of their hearts, which rested in the outward ceremonies, as if they were ordained for themselves, and not to signify any other thing. They were observant of the ceremonies, but did not observe the end and purpose of them. Therefore doth God so often protest against sacrifices. A sacrifice was not acceptable to God but according as they did eye Christ in it. Now they used no farther reach or recollection, but rested in the sacrifices; as Isa. 66:3, 'He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man.' And therefore did God so often tell them that 'the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to him.'

[2] Because of their want of due observation how God did fulfil his promise concerning the Messiah, few troubled themselves about it. Only the pious Jews lived in a continual expectation of it, and their hearts were always upon the wing of strong and earnest desires after it. It is said, Luke 2:25, Simeon 'waited for the consolation of Israel.' He was a man whose thoughts ran that way. So Daniel, chap. 9:2, 'sought by books;' then, ver. 21, an angel tells him the time of the Messiah. But others were negligent.

[3] Their obstinate hatred against the prophets that revealed these things concerning Christ. They reprov'd their other sins, and therefore they believed them not in this: Jer. 5:13, 'The prophets shall become wind, and the word of the Lord is not in them.' Disaffection is the great prejudice against anything. They judg'd it false or to no purpose before it was spoken. The Jews, though they honoured the prophets when dead, could not endure them whilst living: Mat. 23:29, 30, 'Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' But that was a deceit, as I shall show you by and by. These three I conceive to be the causes why, in the prophets' time, they did not believe; they are to be marked by us, because there is somewhat in them suitable to the case of gospel unbelievers, viz., a circle and track of cold duties; a non-attendance on God in his ordinances; and a wicked spirit of contradiction against his word.

2. John Baptist's time. I distinguish this from the former, because Christ doth so, Mat. 11:11, 'Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; and yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' And Christ saith that he is 'more than a prophet.' He made a more glorious report of Jesus Christ, as being

immediately to come; and then a common rumour was given forth that the Messiah's time was come. Now what were the prejudices then?

[1] The levity and rashness of the people. If any man were more eminent than other, they presently cried him up for the Messiah, and therefore, being disappointed in some, they were prejudiced against all Luke 3:15, 'And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or no; John answered them, There cometh one after me who is mightier than I.' He plainly directeth them to another. Multitudes flocked to him indeed, but it was out of a nice and vain curiosity. Few believed his report.

[2] The evil influence of the scribes and pharisees, who thought all the water lost that went beside their own mill. They would fain keep the people under their beck and pleasure, and therefore had a vigilant eye upon every new way, or anything that might seem to take off from that respect and devotion wherewith the people were engaged to them. By-ends in some that should have been teachers, have been always a hindrance to the entertainment of Christ. Those that preached Christ for their own ends were enemies to the cross of Christ, Phil. 3:19.

[3.] Offence at John's boldness. His office was to humble and change proud hearts, and he goeth about his work vigorously, therefore they forsook him. I shall speak no more of this, because it will fall in with the next head.

3. As to the time of Christ's being in the flesh. There were divers prejudices concerning him, both in the Jews and in the Gentiles.

First, In the Jews. I will name the chief.

[1.] An erroneous opinion of the Messiah. The people thought he would set up an earthly kingdom; they were weary of the Roman yoke, and expected that he would free them from it. See an excellent place for this, John 6:14,15, 'When the men had seen his miracles, they said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. And when Jesus saw that by force they would come and make him king, he departed into a mountain alone.' They conceived he was able to gratify their malice on their enemies, out of a hope, conceived from his miracles, that he could maintain an army with very little cost. But Christ would not hold by that tenure. He would be king of their hearts, not of their lands. And therefore, being disappointed, they rejected him. There is nothing prejudiceth a man more against a thing than a false conceit of it. When we expect what we do not find in it, we loathe it. The apostle calleth this 'knowing Christ after the flesh,'—in a pompous carnal way. This is to be noted, because we have such gross conceits in our hearts. We expect Christ should serve us in our own

ends, as St Austin speaketh of those conceits he had of God when he was a *child*—*Sentiebam te esse magnum aliquem qui potes exaudire et subvenire nos; et rogabam te parvus, non parvo affectu, ne in schola vapularem* (I perceived you to be one who is great because you could hear clearly and were able to help us, and I asked you to be small, when with no small emotion I [prayed] that I would not be beaten at school). Such childish conceits have some entertained of Christ, they could close with him to serve their covetousness, revenge, or vainglory. They look upon him as some great thing that should help them.

[2.] A fond reverence of Moses and the prophets, as if it were derogatory to them to close with Christ: John 9:29, ‘We are Moses’ disciples; as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.’ This Christ confutes, John 5:46, ‘If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed me.’

[3.] Offence at his outward meanness (that is the scope of this chapter), and the persecution he met with; the just judgment of God upon them to fit them for destruction. Thus much for the Jews.

Secondly, As to the Gentiles, there were divers prejudices why they would not believe the gospel when tendered to them.

[1.] Pride in the understanding. They were loth to captivate their knowledge to the obedience of Christ, and to make their principles of reason strike sail to the truth represented. Therefore, 1 Cor. 1:23, it is said, ‘Christ crucified’ was ‘to the Greeks foolishness.’ It was a foolish doctrine, because contrary to their forestalled principles. This is to be noted by us also, because we are very unwilling to receive anything but what cometh dyed in the colour of our own conceits, and is suitable to our carnal minds.

[2.] The meanness of the reporters, poor fishermen; though sufficient enough for the matter they took in hand by the Spirit’s mighty assistance, yet of no great repute and value in the world. God would have the gospel commend itself to have a respect without the addition of any outward excellency, and therefore he useth the ministry of mean and weak men: Ps. 8:6, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength.’ God knoweth how prone the world is to close with a truth upon a preposterous ground, not for its own sake; we cannot endure to stoop to a mean man. That of Salvian is very

true: *Omnia dicta tanti existimantur quantus est ipse qui dixit, nec tam dictionis vim respiciunt quam diclitoris dignitatem* (All things that are said are estimated as much according to the one who speaks, as according to the strength of what the speaker says). Men look to the worth of the speaker. Any

attempt at innovation or alteration must needs be ill taken from them who are in the eye of the world very mean and low, especially against such practices as have been authorised by men of gravity and great judgment, countenanced by antiquity and long custom, confirmed by the joint consent of all; for men to quit such practices upon the intimation of persons of mean presence and estates, it must needs be a great prejudice. As it is said, Paul's bodily presence was base and contemptible among them, 2 Cor. 10:10. Therefore, having so many obstructions in the way, well might the prophet cry out 'Who hath believed our report?' It is good to observe this, because this is a great prejudice against the entertaining of many of the truths of Christ in our days: we have men's persons in disesteem and contempt.

[3.] The hard conditions upon which they were to entertain Christ. He was not, as other of their gods, to be worshipped in company; he was to be worshipped alone: they were to forsake all their old ways and worship, and to abridge themselves of their unlawful gains and trades; and this was a prejudice they could not brook: Acts 19:27, If this doctrine go on, 'our craft is in danger to be set at nought.' They were to expose themselves to all the obloquy and scorn that could be. It was crime enough to say they were Christians— *Vir bonus nisi quod Christianus* ([He would be] a good man if he were not a Christian). They were to be cast upon the disadvantage of the hatred of near friends, upon all manner of persecution and cruelty, to be led about the cities and amphitheatres as the objects of public scorn and malice,—nay, and these things were not to be hidden from them, and only the lighter and better part revealed to them,—if they would be Christ's disciples. This is a prejudice enough, you will say, against a new way,—enough to make the world look upon it as some odd, humorous conceit of a few brain-sick persons, who had no other bait to allure to their way but fire and faggot, whips and scourges; for the present they would promise you nothing but these things. Well might they cry out, Who will believe our report? God would have no outward blandishment at first, that the truths of religion might not be suspected; and indeed hence did so few believe, insomuch that the cause of Christianity never came to an indifferent hearing; they hated the name, and would not let it plead for itself. Thus for the Gentiles.

4. I come now to prove it in our times, or the time of the first promulgation of the gospel. I might divide my discourse into these two heads: Few believe the report of Christ, and few believe in Christ. I prove the latter. We all profess ourselves Christians, disciples of Christ, those that have entertained him,—but few do really believe. The lets and hindrances now are these:—

[1.] Ignorance. Men hear of Christ, but are not acquainted with him; many come to the ordinances, but only to sit out the hour, not to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is much in a man's ends why he cometh to the ordinances: God seldom meets with a man in his word that cometh to it with a vain end; if they do not seek after knowledge they shall not find it. Many of the reports of Jesus Christ are lost upon an ignorant people; they hear the name, and do not weigh the thing in their thoughts; they look upon him as *aliquem magnum*—as some great person that the preachers talk of, and go no further. Thousands are damned this way through their ignorance; they do not trouble their thoughts about getting the knowledge of Christ in his word, they come to the church and rest in that. There must be distinct apprehensions of the report of Christ before faith, not only to hear the sound, but weigh the sense: Rom. 10:14, 'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' that is, not only the sound of his name, but heard so as to weigh the doctrine that was delivered concerning him. This affected ignorance is a great hindrance when men do not apply themselves to knowledge; as it is, Prov. 2:2,3, 'Incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest for knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding.' Many incline their ears, but they do not apply their hearts to knowledge, weigh and ponder what they hear; if they attend to it while it is spoken, they do not consider it afterwards in their more serious thoughts, and ponder it in their minds; and therefore no wonder they do not close with Christ: Rom. 3:11, 'There is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God.' That will necessarily follow, if they do not understand Christ, they will not seek after him; a man will not value an unknown good. This is one hindrance, gross and affected ignorance.

[2] An easy slightness; men do not labour after faith. It is true our diligence alone can never attain it, but yet we should use the means. Men marry to beget children, yet it is impossible they should generate a rational soul without the concurrence of God. So we should do those things that are likely, and leave the success to God: we should seek after it. God will not violently withhold faith from those that are diligent, that are much in meditation, much in earnest supplication, much in observation, much in a continual and holy expectation, when Jesus Christ will be begotten in their souls. God will not fail such a waiting soul Ps. 130:6, 'My soul waiteth for God more than they that watch for the morning; yea, more than they that watch for the morning.' Such souls as are thus eager in the pursuit, and earnest in their expectation, that would fain have Christ come and appear in their hearts, may well expect God's blessing. But there is a great deal of idle and easy lightness in men's hearts; they complain for want of faith, yet they will not pray, meditate, hear, read; as if God

should infuse it into them in their sleep. It were an easy cut to heaven if God should do all. What need had Christ to tell you, 'Strait is the way'? And faith is called a work, not in regard of the toil of it, but in regard of our diligence and intention of spirit. 'This is the work of God, that ye should believe in him whom he hath sent.' It is a sign people do not prize a thing when they do not labour after it. If men thought Christ worthy of respect, they would not sit still, but take pains in the seeking of him. The idle and evil servant are joined together: Mat. 25:26, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant!' The wicked will be slothful; and as idleness and sin are joined together, so idleness and destruction Prov. 1:32, 'Ease slayeth the fool,' so it is in the margin, or, 'The turning away of the simple shall slay them.' Men perish by resting in their slight wishes; they would have Christ, but they would not take the pains to get him. Certainly a man valueth the report of Christ at a low rate when he doth not think it worthy of a few thoughts, and a little time to consider it. You know what Christ saith, Mat. 11:12, 'From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' They close with the gospel, which is called the kingdom of God there, that pursue it with a great deal of earnestness and fervour of spirit. This is the next hindrance, an easy slighthness.

[3] A careless security. They are not won to believe in Christ, because they think themselves well enough without him. Most cannot endure to look beyond their present condition. A false heart is so far from knowing the worst of its own condition, that it will not so much as suppose a time will come in which it maybe miserable. Oh! think upon changes; rouse up your souls with the sense of your danger! If you lull your souls asleep, you may awake in flames; even the gospel is peremptory in this kind: Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth not shall be damned.' It will not be always with you as now. Oh I cry out, then, Do I believe? If men would not put away all thoughts of their eternal condition, they would see a greater need of Christ than now they do. What a strange thing is it to keep the thoughts of that from our heart, which we cannot possibly deliver our souls from hereafter, to wit, endless eternity!—to be witty to deceive our own souls, to invent shifts that we may put far away the evil day! A man doth not care for things till he wanteth them, no, not for the best things, the comforts of Christ, the joys of the Spirit. While we have outward comforts we care not for inward, because we have a false conceit that our comforts will still continue with us: Luke 12:19, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' He would not so much as suppose they might be taken from him that night. A man's peace may be tried by this. Secure hearts cannot endure to think of danger. Though believers think of danger, yet they think more

of Christ. They consider their misery, and so are directed to a remedy against it. Others, though they cannot put away the evil day, they put it out of their thoughts, and labour to make the most of the world they can. Briefly, that security is a hindrance is plain, because the number of believers is increased by those that have least to trust to in the world, and so are necessarily engaged to a consideration of their misery, and a want of something that may stand them in stead at the end of their days: James 2:5, 'Hath God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith?' And yet the poor may be secure'; they have their pleasures and vain thoughts to make them forget their sorrows.

[4] A light esteem of Christ. As we do not see our own needs, so not his worth. As the heart is, so it judgeth. A carnal heart valueth all things by outward pomp and splendour. Such objects take as are most excellent in the eyes of the world: Ps. 144:15, 'Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord.' A man's temper may be discerned by his valuation of things; carnal hearts cannot prize spiritual mercies. We prize those things that are most suitable to our desires: 1 Peter 2:7, 'To them that believe Christ is precious.' He is an honour to them; they look upon him as a most attractive object, and therefore their hearts move after this loadstone. Everything is loved according to the suitableness and proportion it bears to our desires. Therefore see how Christ is spoken of by the faithful: Cant. 5:10, 'As the chiefest among ten thousand;' 'He beareth the banner from ten thousand,' as Ainsworth rendereth it. And in the 16th verse, 'He is altogether lovely.' But see what the world judgeth of him: Isa. 52:14, 'His visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.' Look then to the value you have for a thing, for from thence will arise your endeavours after it. They that will be rich, are drowned and sunk in the cares of this world, they are all for moiling and business. They that love pleasures, their thoughts and the strength and vigour of their souls will run that way. So for honourable preferment, they that seek after it will spend all their thoughts about it. What a man valueth, it will be his work to gain. Therefore this high esteem of Christ taketh off men from these things, Acts 18:15, 16. He that thought the promulgation of the gospel to be but a strife about words and names, 'cared for none of these things.' This is the next hindrance; men that profess themselves Christians, make the getting of Christ the least of their care.

[5.] A presumptuous conceit that we have entertained Christ already. Many think every slight wish, every trivial hope, will serve the turn. Many would be scholars, if they did not think themselves so too soon. I would not weaken any man's confidence; I know it is our office to establish it: 'The fruit of our lips is peace,' Isa. 57:19. But there are those to whom our God will not speak peace. 'No

peace, saith my God, to the wicked.' Many wicked persons think it enough to be named Christians. It is an advantage, I confess, to be born a Christian, but to rest in it maketh it the greatest judgment that can be. People will reason thus, Do not all believe in Christ? Oh, no. Thou: mayest profess Christ, and yet not believe in him. Many depend upon this that they are Christians, as the Jews did that they were the seed of Abraham. I shall touch upon this afterwards.

[6.] Hardness of heart. The mind will not stoop to Christ till it be tamed. John Baptist, that was to prepare the way for Christ, was to bring the mountains and hills low, Luke 3:5. The heart must not only be serious, but humbled, if it would entertain this doctrine. A man must see his error before he will be willing to be governed by Christ, and guided into a better way: Acts 2:37, 'They were pricked at their hearts' before the apostle bid them 'repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.' The heart never yields till it bleedeth with the sense of sin. We have been wrong, oh, what course shall we take? There must be a conviction of sin before that of righteousness. It is happy when both go together, John 16:9; so Acts 16:30, 31. First, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Then comes, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.' A man hath no reason to begin a new way till he is convinced of the vanity of the old one. There must be at least so much of humiliation as to make a man anxious and solicitous about a better course. Well, then, here is another hindrance: a proud and unmortified spirit, a hard heart; a man must get humbled, That you may do so, examine your state by the law, and aggravate it by love. There is some apprehension of love, some general consideration that precedeth faith. You have done all this, and you have done it against a merciful God, and indeed that is a keen argument to wound the spirit: Joel 2:14, 'Rend your hearts, for God is merciful.' See your sins, and aggravate them with unkindness. There is something in nature to make us relent, when we have done wrong to a kind person, that, for aught we know, meant better to us. But of this more by and by.

[7.] Self-confidence. When men's consciences are troubled, they would fain get them eased. Those that are so greedy after quiet and peace, rather than holiness and grace, usually ease themselves in a wrong way; they fly to a few outward duties, or to some slight resolutions for God, and there rest. It is better to keep the conscience raw a while than to skin it over too soon; that will make the wound fester and rankle. Most desire ease too soon, they consult and contrive suddenly how they may ease themselves of that pain and horror that is upon them, and so vainly rest in the way of their own thoughts. A man should not look to be eased of grief till he find himself fitted for holiness, that he may not be engaged to the like grief again; otherwise we shall but stop the grief rather than cure it. We must be directed to a better course, and that must be only by Jesus Christ. It is

a sign we are guilty of this self-confidence when we resolve upon a better life, and do not think how unable we are for it. Great resolutions are always vain, unless joined with the consideration of our own weakness. The people of God have promised much, but always it is with the concurrence of Christ. The apostle saith, Phil. 4:12, 'I can,' or will 'do all things,' but it is 'through Christ.' David promiseth, Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the ways of thy commandments;' but he addeth, 'when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' There are divers such places in scripture. We walk in the strength of our resolutions when we do not see a need that Christ should help us, that we may not walk in the same ways of error and maze of misery again.

[8] Carnal fears. These hinder the soul from closing with that mercy that is reported to be in Christ. They are of divers sorts.

(1.) Fear of God's anger, as if he were so displeased with us that certainly he did not intend Christ for us. Why, consider, the more angry God is, the more need there is to fly to his mercy. His mercy is as infinite as his wrath, nay, I may say more infinite: Ps. 138:2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name;' that is, God's promise in Christ is greater than all other things by which he hath made himself known. Christ was an instance of infinite wrath and infinite mercy at the same time, but rather of infinite mercy. Nay; to clear all, God expressly saith, 'Anger is not in me.'

(2.) Fear of being too bold with the promises. Take heed of mere formality with God. A man cannot be too bold where he is so freely invited: Mat. 11:28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.' You are unworthy to believe, but God is worthy to be obeyed. And 'this is his commandment,' 1 John 3:3, 'That we should believe in the name of Jesus Christ.'

(3.) Fear of the sin of presumption. Oh! they shall presume too much. A man doth not presume if he knoweth his own danger; if he be lost to himself and his own apprehension, it is pity he should be lost to God too. Presumers are seldom troubled about their estate; it is enough to disturb a false peace so much as to suspect it. There can be no presumption where there are no slight thoughts of sin and mercy. The mind cannot presume when it is serious.

[9.] Carnal reasonings from our sins. They are arguments of confidence, but not of dejection: Ps. 25:11, 'Pardon my sin, for it is great.' If so, it is the better for God to pardon. Sins should not hinder a man from duty. It is your duty to believe. The sense of sickness will cause us to make use of the physician. You cannot see anything in sin, but you may see more in Christ. Not greatness: Ps. 57:10, 'Thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds; Not number: Rom. 5:16, 'The free gift is of many offences 'unto justification.'

[10.] And lastly, carnal apprehensions of Christ. We will believe no more to be in God than we find in ourselves: 1 Sam. 24:19, 'Who findeth his enemy, and slayeth him not? will he let him go well away?' The soul in all her conclusions is only directed by premises experimental and of sensible apprehension. We think God is but as man; we are used to the dispositions of men, and therefore cannot believe there is anything more in God: Ps. 1. 22, 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself.' But remember, 'God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent,' Num. 23:19; and Hosea 11:9, 'I will spare Ephraim, for I am God, and not man;' so Isa. 54:8-10, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Jer. 3:1, 'If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return to her again? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return unto me again, saith the Lord.'

Use 1. Is by way of information. It informeth us of divers truths; as—

1. That the paucity or fewness of followers is no disgrace to a thing or doctrine. The world followeth the multitude, as if the way to religion were like that to a town, where there is the greatest track Luke 12:32, 'Fear not, little flock,' ***mikron poimmion***. Christ's flock is a little flock. The world usually casteth that prejudice. There may be but one Micaiah against four hundred false prophets.

2. It informeth us that the number of believers is not as large as the number of professors: 2 Thes. 3:2, 'All men have not faith.'

3. That it is a very difficult thing to believe, and therefore so few attain it.

Use 2. Is by way of examination. If but few are won to believe this report, examine yourselves—Are you of the number? Are you of the number of those that are won by the preaching of the word to believe in Christ? I will name a few effects:—

1. If so, you will find this persuasion melting you: Zech. 12:10, 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication: and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.' God and the soul come together just as Saul and David: 1 Sam. 24:16, 'Saul lift up

his voice and wept; Is this thy voice, my son David?' Thus the soul, Oh! didst thou love me so, O Lord my God?

2. You will find it teaching you a way to resist sin. You could not tell how to prevail against it before, now you have a cutting argument against it: Titus 2:11, 12, 'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' Now you are taught to gainsay sin.

3. You will find it quickening you to good: 2 Cor. 5:14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' 'Such melting commands and commanding entreaties have a powerful influence to that effect: 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'

I shall now come to the second point, namely—

II. That the gospel, or the report concerning Jesus Christ, is the arm and power of God. Though it be *our* report, yet it is the arm *of the Lord*. There is some controversy, as I hinted before, about what is meant by the arm of the Lord; some applying it to Christ, some to the word. I rather incline to the latter, but it is good to observe, that what is spoken of Christ, the same is spoken also of the word. Christ is called 'the power of God,' I Cor. 1:24; and the gospel is called 'the power of God,' 1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16; because in the word Christ is made known, and his excellencies are displayed. And what is spoken of the word is spoken of faith. Christ is revealed

to the heart by the word, and so he is likewise by faith.

But in what respect is the gospel the arm and power of God? I answer:—

1. In respect of the sense and meaning of it, which is to be regarded above the bare sound of the letters and syllables. Many make a charm of the word of God, by applying some sentences of it to drive away diseases in a way of exorcism and conjuration, or by coming to it in a customary way, as if the mere hearing or reading of it were sufficient; as if salvation were to be had by the bare hearing of it: John 5:39, 'Search the scriptures,' saith our Saviour, 'for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.' ***Dokeite en autaiVzwhn aiwnion***, 'ye think ye have;' this is not barely a command, but a reproof, otherwise Christ would have said 'ye shall.' He speaketh it to the pharisees and hypocrites that had rejected him.

2. In regard it manifests the power of God. There are instances of God's eternal power in the creatures, Rom. 1:20, but the great and mighty instances of his power are discovered in the word. God showeth his strength every day, but in the gospel he holdeth forth 'the man whom he hath made strong for himself,' Ps. 80:15, the branch or Son, meaning Christ—though he is there speaking of the church's afflictions: 'The vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou makest strong for thyself.'

3. It is said to be the arm and power of God, chiefly as it is a glorious instrument in his hands, as a weapon that is managed by the Spirit, which will work mightily indeed. It is observable that when Isaiah speaketh of the word as pronounced by the prophets, he saith *our report*; but as revealed by the Spirit, *the arm of the Lord*. You must understand it as accompanied with the Spirit's efficacy: 2 Cor. 10:4, 'The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God;' there lies its force. So 2 Cor. 3:6, 'Who hath made us able ministers of the new testament: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' He calleth the law the letter, as it showeth what is to be done, but ministereth no abilities. The letter killeth, leaveth us miserable, but the gospel, accompanied with the Spirit, is an efficacious instrument to beget life in us; because all the efficacy thereof depends upon the Spirit, therefore, in opposition to the law, it is called spirit.

4. It is called the arm and power of God, because in one sense it worketh much even upon those on whom it has the least effect. It is powerful to their destruction, if not to their salvation: Heb. 4:12, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword.' It is 'the savour of death unto death,' if not 'of life unto life.' It is not a dead letter even there where it cannot obtain the least entrance into the heart; it bindeth them over to judgment, if it cannot force them over to obedience. It is a heavy arm of God to the wicked; if they be not converted, they are judged, by the word. An arm, you know, is used in scripture in both senses, to protect friends, and to destroy enemies; and to that purpose it is said of God by the Psalmist Ps. 89:13, 'Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.' This mighty power of the word appears in divers ways.

[1.] It troubleth sinners. The power of the gospel awakeneth their consciences, for fear of which they cannot so freely run into such excess and outrage as otherwise they would, Acts 24:25. When Paul 'reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.' When a guilty conscience is touched, it is enraged: Acts 7:54, 'When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth.' It causeth a tumult in the soul of a guilty creature; if nothing else, the word worketh such a trouble in them, that they cannot be at rest in their minds.

[2.] It worketh some faint resolutions in sinners to look after Christ: Acts 26:28, 'Thou almost persuadest me to be a Christian.' They have much ado to put off the force of the word, and therefore are even won by it. It argueth a mighty power in the gospel, that it can put a wicked man on acting, though weakly, against the bent and inclination of his evil heart. And it is some argument of the divine power in the gospel, that men are brought thereby to wish and resolve against their evil practices, though they will not leave them.

[3.] It judgeth them, it bindeth them over to eternal punishment; as it is said, I Cor. 14:24, of the unbeliever, 'He is convinced of all, he is judged of all;' that is, his sentence is passed upon him in the word: John 3:18, 'He that believeth not is condemned already;' that is, the power of the word is passed upon him: Mark 16:16, 'Go preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth not shall be damned.' That is the peremptory sentence of the gospel.

[4.] It punisheth them, the arm of God is upon them. It is said to the stubborn Jews, Zech. 1:6, 'But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?' Mark, not so much the wrath and vengeance of God, as the prophet's words. So it is said, 1 Kings 19:17, 'It shall come to pass, that he that escapeth the sword of Hazael, shall Jehu slay: and he that escapeth from the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay.' So Hosea 6:5, 'I have hewed them by my prophets: I have slain them by the words of my mouth.' So much for the determination of this point.

To prove it now, it will appear by two things:—

1. By the uses for which God did appoint it.
2. By the glorious effects of it, suitable to those ends of God. I shall handle both together.

Let us consider the uses for which God did appoint the publication of the gospel, and certainly you will then say it is the arm of the Lord. God's designs by the preaching of the gospel are either public or private.

First, Public, which are—

1. To purchase and gain the world for a kingdom and an inheritance for Jesus Christ.
2. To conquer all the enemies of Christ.

Secondly, Private, so it is to convert souls. The appointment of the gospel for these ends sheweth there is the arm of God in it.

First, Public, which are—

1. To purchase the whole world for a kingdom and an inheritance for Jesus Christ. This is the main end of the gospel, and therefore it is called, Ps. 110:2, ‘The sceptre and rod of Christ’s strength.’ The gospel is the sceptre of Christ; it was by the word that he was to sway the nations; and so Mat. 13:19, it is called ‘the word of the kingdom.’ Now, how should a man purchase a kingdom but by his arm? Great enterprises require proportionable strength, and therefore such a glorious design as this necessarily calleth for the arm and power of God. That this reason may have its due force on you, do but consider what it is to purchase the world for Christ, and what prejudices and difficulties there are against it that must be overcome.

[1.] The report of Jesus Christ was a despised truth. If a man would win others to his conceits and opinions, policy requireth that he should make them as plausible as he can. It is difficult to win a. people from their old religion, though a new one that is proposed be never so agreeable to reason. But now, when this is utterly inconsistent with our former apprehensions and notions about religion, the mind riseth against it; it stoppeth all further inquiry after the truth of it. Now such was the report of Jesus Christ to all the world: you may divide them into Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were to be brought off from their fond esteem of Moses and the prophets; the Gentiles were to be won from their old vain religions, received by traditions from their fathers: and we well know by experience how ill changes in religion are brooked in the world. But that was not all; they were to leave their religion that they had so long professed, and to expect (what they thought very absurd) eternal life and happiness by him whom they looked on as an object of misery, and who suffered such a shameful death himself: 1 Cor. 1:18, ‘The preaching of the cross was to them that perished foolishness.’ It might well be so among them that perished; the prejudice was as great among them that professed: Mat. 27:42, ‘He saved others; himself he cannot save: if he be the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him.’

[2.] It was given forth by despised persons. If a man would be prevailed with by any, he would be by men of some repute and renown in the world. But now, Ps. 8:6, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength.’ If babes and sucklings could prevail so much by the use of their mouths, certainly there is some secret and invisible force in such doctrines, or else it would not prevail for babes’ and sucklings to speak so prevailingly as Christ promised: Luke 21:15, ‘I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall never be able to gainsay nor resist.’ So, much power in so much appearing weakness argueth a divine arm.

2. The next end was to conquer the enemies of Christ. To conquer their minds, or destroy their bodies, the best weapon is the gospel, especially to do the former. This is the ark that beats all the Dragons in pieces. It is said, Isa. 11:4, 'He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.' Mark, it is with the rod of his mouth; the gospel slayeth the outward enemies, and the mists of error do inwardly vanish before this sun. As—[1.] The paganish rites and worship were forced to give place to it, as the oracle of Delphos, which had voice enough left to proclaim its own silence, and also that among the rocks of Sicily. But then—

[2.] As to antichristianism, God hath appointed the word to be a weapon against it: 2 Thes. 2:8, it is said, 'God shall consume them with the spirit of his mouth, and with the brightness of his coming.' God bloweth in the mouth of his ministers the force of their words against Antichrist; it is the spirit or breath of his mouth. When the gospel was a little revived by Luther, how many of his kingdom did Antichrist lose? The goose-quill gave him a deadly wound, saith Beza; Rev. 11:13: when the witnesses had finished their testimony, 'the tenth part of the city fell.' This is a most powerful engine to shake the strongholds of that city, these blasts of the gospel. The great policy of that party is to withhold people from the knowledge of the gospel. When Dr Day discoursed with Stephen Gardiner concerning free justification by Christ, saith he, 'O Mr Doctor, open that gap to the people, and we are undone!' The more gospel there is discovered, the more Antichrist is discovered. Free grace puts the foundation of that way out of course.

[3.] All lesser errors, like the little foxes, are slain by this sword. Those that went greedily after Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, what doth God say to them? 'Repent, or I will come and fight against thee with the sword of my mouth,' Rev. 2:16; that is, with his word. That is punishment enough, to detect their errors by the gospel. The sword is put for a powerful weapon; the sword in, the mouth sheweth it was the word; God's appointing it to these great uses argueth there is a divine power in it.

Secondly, Private; and that is to convert souls: Ps. 19:7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' This is such a difficult work that it must needs require a divine power. That this may be of use to you, I shall show you what a difficult thing it is to convert a soul, there being so many obstacles and hindrances against it, and yet the word is the only fit instrument to overcome them.

1. There is Satan, who is strong. The devil hath great power to possess the hearts of wicked men; he is said to 'work in the children of disobedience,' Eph.

2:2. Those frequent possessions in Christ's time were a discovery of that spiritual thralldom in which the heart of man is engaged whilst in the service of the devil: 2 Tim. 2:26, 'That they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.' As violent tempests whirl things at their pleasure, so doth he our blinded understandings and crooked, wills. We are taken of the devil in his snare, to be led about at his will and pleasure. Well, then, no power but that of God can set us free; it must be by the mighty ministry of his arm. The strong man. will hold fast till he be cast out by a stronger than he, Luke 11:22. It is not so easy dispossessing the old man, and to turn from the power of Satan to the power of God.

2. The perverseness of man's heart. The chief hindrances there are these:—[1] Subtle evasions, crafty pretences, whereby to evade and escape the power of the word: Heb. 4:12, 'Piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.' The soul is that faculty wherein the affections do reside; the spirit is the reasoning power; it reveals the closest affections of the heart, and the most secret plots and devices of the spirit; it telleth the heart how it cleaveth to sin, and the mind how it plotteth pretences to hide it The mind and spirit conspire together.

[2.] Crafty disputes and reasonings. There are great and many perverse debates in our hearts against the things of God; therefore the apostle expresses the power of the word thus: 2 Cor. 10:5, 'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ' It demolisheth all carnal reasonings, and convinceth of truth. Then—

[3.] Swelling lusts. To tame these, nay, to set up the work of grace instead of these, must needs argue a divine hand. It is a hard matter to break the course of any inclination, much more of a rooted affection; to break the very course of nature; to turn lions into lambs, as it is said, 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.' There shall be such a wonderful change, that the violence and turbulency of the affections shall be done away. To make the filthy and intemperate to become chaste and sober, and to make the proud to become humble, argueth the great power of God. Thus you see how it overcometh difficulties.

But now observe how powerfully and wonderfully the word worketh this. It is not by a fond conceit and opinion of it in the minds of men: 'The simple believeth every word,' as it is said in the Proverbs; and some weak persons may be easily awed into a scrupulous fear. But, on the contrary—

(1.) It hath wrought upon them that have been ‘cast upon it unawares, that looked for no such thing. The apostle saith of unbelievers: 1 Cor. 14:24, ‘And there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned; he is convinced of all, he is judged of all,’ if he be by chance put upon the ordinances. Thus we read in the story of Austin and of Firmus, who, though they looked for nothing less, yet were wrought upon, and converted to God.

(2.) Those that came with a mind to despise the word have been won by it. The unbeliever that cometh in falleth down on his face, 1 Cor. 14:25. It may bring men that have wrong conceits of the *ways* of God on their faces, and to say, ‘God is in them of a truth.’

Use 1. Is exhortation. And that—

1. To ministers. Is the gospel the arm and power of God? ‘Then—

[1] Be not ashamed of it, but preach it boldly. St Paul saith, Rom. 1:16, ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.’ Many are ashamed of the naked simplicity of the gospel, and therefore hanker the more after profound parts and human learning. You must imitate Christ; preach boldly; as having authority from him.

[2] Wait for the success of it. Doubt of success is a great discouragement, and taketh off the wheels of a man’s ministry. Refer it to God; it is his own arm, if it cannot be mighty through us, it will be mighty through God: Jer. 1:9, ‘I have put my words in thy mouth.’ It is a great lesson of holy wisdom, if we could learn it. to mind duty, and refer the success to God.

[3.] To dispense it faithfully; not to use God’s arm for our own ends. There is a preaching the gospel out of envy, Phil. 1:16. This is a putting God in a servility to our designs, a prostituting of the greatest power to the vilest uses, an debasing a thing beneath its office.

[4.] To dispense it so as to look to the Spirit to make it effectual; not to think to make it work by our own fancies: 1 Cor. 2:4, ‘My preaching was not with the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.’ A minister may be apt to be too full of self. The old Adam may be too hard for young Melancthon. It is said of Christ, Luke 24:32, that ‘he opened the scriptures;’ and ver. 45, ‘Then he opened their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures.’

2. To the people.

[1.] To all in general.

[2.] To those to whom the arm of the Lord is revealed and made known.

[1.] To all in general: to press them to see God in his word. Many see no more than what is of man, and therefore are not wrought upon by it. The power of God is veiled under our weakness: 1 Thes. 2:13, ‘Ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.’ But what is it to receive it as the word of God?

I answer—It is to receive it:—

(1.) With reverence. It is a description of God’s people that they tremble at his word,’ Isa. 66:2,5. Do not slight it as if it were but a little sound poured out into the air.

(2.) Look up unto God, and wait upon him for this power to be let into your hearts. ‘See that, besides the report, you have a discovery of God’s power and arm. Do not rest contented with enjoying the word till you feel the power of God making it effectual on your hearts. Oh, be careful lest it should work upon you the wrong way, and prove the savour of death unto death I As the people waited for the angel’s stirring of the waters, so do you for the Spirit’s motion. Man’s voice can but pierce the ear: *Cathedram habet in coelis qui corda docet* (He who teaches the hearts has a seat in heaven), God only can reach the heart.

(3.) Receive it into your hearts, open your souls for it with such a resolution as is expressed, Acts 10:33, ‘We are all here present before thee, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.’ Then it is a sign we are willing to take home the message to ourselves.

(4.) Let not your thoughts rest in the abilities of the minister, if your hearts be touched: Acts 3:12, ‘Peter answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly upon us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?’ It is not our report, but God’s arm; we are but the instruments, his arm must do the work.

[2.] To those to whom the arm of the Lord is made known, two duties I shall exhort them unto:—

(1.) To behold and admire the power of God working in them for their salvation: Eph. 1:19, ‘That ye may know the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.’ A man doth not know the excellency of this power till he takes a review of it. Man can better observe such experiences when past, when he seeth and feeleth such a power of God upon his soul.

(2.) To walk worthy of it in their conversation;—to walk so as a man may perceive the power of God hath passed upon him: 1 Peter 2:9, ‘That you should

show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Inward holiness is expressed by the power of godliness. Take heed of having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. Oh, do not carry it as if there were no power passed upon you!

Use 2. Is of examination. See whether any of this power hath passed upon, your hearts. Have you ever felt the power of the Spirit in the ordinances, that will convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment?

1. Hath it powerfully humbled you for sin? There is the power of the word seen to bring men upon their faces, and to make them lay their mouths in the dust, I Cor. 14:25. The first work is to humble the heart and to subdue the pride of it.

2. Is it powerful to comfort and refresh the soul? Every man hath not comfort, but every man that hath it can tell which way it cometh: Psa. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.' What is the refreshment of your hearts? Is it not the power of God's Spirit? When a man is in distress, it is known what he maketh his trust in: then we shall see what our heart fetcheth comfort from. Do you look upon gospel comforts as powerful? John 16:33, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have rest; be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

3. Is it powerful to enable to holiness? You will then be able to gain upon your lusts more, they will not be so pleasing to you: Ps. 110:3, 'Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power.' You will be made ready to duty, and be more cheerful in God's service, when the power of the word hath passed upon you.

I now proceed to the last point observable in this verse, which is:—

III. That none believe the report that is made of Jesus Christ, but those to whom it is revealed by the Spirit.

It is meant of an inward revelation; though it were outwardly proclaimed in their ears, yet the power of the report was not secretly conveyed into their hearts. The arm of the Lord was not revealed to them. Or thus:—

The cause why so few are won to believe in Jesus Christ is because they have not the Spirit's revelation.

This I shall prove to you by these reasons:—

1. Because without the Spirit's revelation all the outward tenders and reports of Jesus Christ will be to no purpose. The efficacy of the word lieth in the Spirit's assistance. I told you in the former point how powerful the word of God

is, but withal I told you it was when the Spirit sets it home upon the heart. God may knock at the door and yet no man open to him; and, therefore, he speaketh by way of supposition, if he doth but barely knock: Rev. 3:20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me' It is put upon an *if*: it is a great peradventure whether any man will open the door or no, when it is but a bare knock of the word. The spouse pleadeth excuses when Christ stood and knocked, saying, 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled,' Cant. 5:2; but in the 4th verse it is said, 'My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him;'—that signifieth the working of his Spirit, and then she opened. Men would fain take one nap more in sin when they are roused by the ministry; but when God puts his fingers upon the handles of the lock, Christ hath an admittance and the door then flieth open: Acts 11:19-21, 'The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.' God's hand was upon the lock. If the word be anywhere spoken of as powerful, it is in reference to the Spirit, as 1 Thes. 1:5, 'Our word came unto you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost;' therefore in power, because in the Holy Ghost.

2. Because the Spirit's revelation is the token of God's special love; and that is not given to every one: God has appointed his special love but for a few. The outward revelation is to leave men without excuse; it is but a token of God's common love: 2 Cor. 4:3, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost'—hidden from their hearts, though it be revealed to their ears. Those that are lost have not the inward discoveries—that is, the effectual discovery and special effect of God's peculiar love: Acts 13:48, 'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed;' such have God's special love. Those that have least have many times an outward revelation: Acts 14:17, 'God left not himself without a witness, in that he did good;' yet, ver. 16, 'he suffered them to walk in their own ways.' They had a revelation, but they had not an *efficacious* revelation. And in this sense it is said, that 'many are called but few are chosen, many are invited and few wrought upon. They have the doctrine of life propounded to them, but they have not the Spirit of life setting it home upon their hearts; few taste of God's special love.

3. Because the least of Christ that is made known to the soul is made known by the Spirit; even common illumination, any slight taste of the doctrine of life, it cometh from the Spirit. Those that apostatised afterwards are said, Heb. 6:4, to be 'made partakers of the Holy Ghost.' A historical persuasion of the truth of the articles of religion flows hence. There are some things like this inward effectual revelation in the hearts of wicked men, namely, some notional

irradiations and illuminations in many profound mysteries of the scripture. In this sense is that place to be understood: 1 Cor. 12:3, 'No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed;' and that, 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.' Even their common illumination and profession that Jesus is the Lord was from the Holy Ghost. And so that, Mat. 16:16,17, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered, Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' He did not learn this from nature, but from a revelation. Even, I say, a notional apprehension of these truths, without any fiducial assent given to them, is from the manifestation of the Spirit, and, therefore, much more is this the cause of believing.

4. Because there is so much corruption in a man that hindereth the soul from believing in Jesus Christ, that it cannot be done away without the Spirit's manifestation. There is a double seat of this corruption—the mind and the heart. First, in the mind there is ignorance and unteachableness. Secondly, In the heart there is obstinacy and carelessness; which things cannot be conquered any otherwise than by the Spirit of God. Let us look upon these things severally. Consider a man naturally as he is:—

[1.] In his mind; and so—

(1.) There is ignorance; he hath no savoury apprehension of the truths of God: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned: There is no suitableness between the heart and the things of Christ; and, therefore, though they understand the words, they have confused apprehension of the thing, and cannot tell what to make of them for their comfort and peace. These sottish conceits in the minds of men prepossess them against the receiving of Jesus Christ. They are like leaky vessels that cannot hold this precious liquor; the cockleshell of their brains cannot empty this ocean. A natural man hath abundance of confused, indistinct, indefinite conceits of Jesus Christ. Festus said, Acts 25:19, That the Jews and Paul had 'a controversy about their own superstitions, and of one Jesus, that was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive;' as if it were no more. And the like conceits are to be found not only in him but in all natural men. They do but look upon him as Austin in his infancy said he did upon God, *Tanquam aliquem magnum*—as some great remedy against all evils. Now these conceits, though they be a little rectified in some by pregnancy of wit, ripeness of experience, and industrious meditation, yet no savoury knowledge, nor wisdom to salvation, can be fetched out of these divine truths but by the Spirit. We cannot learn Christ, as the apostle speaketh. A man may know Christ, but he hath not learned Christ, Eph. 4:20. That

supposeth a teacher, which is the Spirit of God: John 6:45, ‘They shall all be taught of God.’ The Spirit teacheth us Christ, so as to have communion and fellowship with him—to fetch comfort out of him; and this helpeth our natural light, and doth indeed set off Christ to us: Job 32:8, ‘There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.’ Then we begin to look upon Jesus Christ with a true and distinct eye. A man may have eyes, but if he have not light he cannot see well, nor discern the distinct shape of things. Light must come to light;—first the light of the sun or candle to the light of the eye. Thus our reason must be helped to fasten upon divine truths so as to fetch comfort out of them. Thus ignorant men cannot tell what to make of the promises of the gospel or the commandments of the gospel, what to think of Christ or what to believe. Therefore, it is said, 1 Cor. 2:10, ‘The deep things of God’ are ‘revealed to us by his Spirit;’ that giveth us the knowledge of the truth and worth of them.

(2.) Unteachableness. We are not only in the dark, but blind; we have not only lost the use, but the faculty: 1 Cor. 2:14, ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of Goo, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ We have no spiritual eyes, and therefore we cannot see spiritual things. Things are apprehended by us according as they carry a proportion and suitableness to our hearts. Now our hearts are so gross that we cannot measure truths by them. This unteachableness remaineth in the soul till the Spirit disposes it to knowledge; and therefore St Paul prayeth, Eph. 1:17,18, ‘That God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and open the eyes of their understanding’—take away the scales. And so you read, Luke 24:29, That Christ ‘opened their understanding;’ i.e., made it, teachable. The word is not only proposed to them to rectify their apprehensions of Christ, but their minds are opened; which implieth, that as they had no light, so they had closed eyes, a wicked mind as well as a weak mind, a mind disaffected, prejudiced, full of corrupt principles and reasonings that are advanced [against] the truth.

[2.] In the heart there is carelessness and stubbornness. And therefore, as God must teach their minds, so he must draw their hearts; as it is said, John 6:44, ‘No man cometh unto me, except the Father draw him.’ The power of the Spirit must be put forth into the soul to bend it to Christ.

Let us take notice of these two evils.

(1.) Carelessness. Men slight Christ, and then they are not won to believe in him. This carelessness cometh from two things:—(1st.) A love of ease. Men cannot think of Christ without reluctancy, and they are loth to put themselves to

the trouble. When the spouse is lodged in the bed of security, see how she pleadeth: 'I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?' A carnal, careless heart, that loveth ease, sticketh at every little hesitancy and vain excuse. In hot countries, where they went barefoot, they were wont to wash their feet after travel. They are loth to arise to entertain Christ for fear of trouble and loss to themselves: Prov. 20:4, 'The sluggard will not plough because of the cold: Many do not care for Christ, because it will cost them some pains and care to pursue after him. They must follow him through so many prayers, meditation, and observation, that they had rather sit still. There is need of a great deal of revelation to make the soul seriously to attend. The spouse fainted, Cant. 5:6, when Christ put his finger into the key-hole of the lock: 'Then I rose up and opened to my beloved, and my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone; my soul failed when he spake.' When he beginneth to touch the wards of the heart, all idle excuses vanish, then nothing but Christ will satisfy the heart. So Acts 2:37, 'When they were pricked in their hearts, then they cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Men that are not converted indulge their vain thoughts and excuses still; but when that is once past, they cannot dally with salvation any more: Acts 16:30, the jailer saith 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' Oh, tell me quickly, it can brook no delay!

(2dly.) Doting upon other excellencies. One love, like a nail, driveth out another. A man slighteth a thing when the stream of his affections are carried another way. Some had a farm, some a yoke of oxen, some had married a wife, some one excuse, some another; but they all said, 'I cannot come.' Men are severally taken up, either with honours, or profits, or pleasures; but all keep from Christ. Therefore there is need of the Spirit's revelation, to display the beauties of Christ before the soul, that they may see that there is more in this beloved than in other beloveds, Cant. 5:9; that so the force of our ill affections may be broken, and the stream of the heart diverted another way, and brought about to Christ. This is that which is desired in that request, 'Draw me; we will run after thee,' Cant. 1:4; that the Spirit would display the glory of Christ to the soul, that we may look upon him as an attractive object, and so find our hearts and our desires following after him. Thus for carelessness.

(2.) Stubbornness of heart, that is another thing. There is a wilfulness in men; they will not believe, because they will not believe. Men will not close with Jesus Christ; God showeth them the way, and they contemptuously reject it: John 5:40, 'Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.' Christ inviteth men by the gospel 'Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden;.' and they will not come; there is no answer in the heart to God's call because of this stubbornness of spirit. But now, when gospel invitations are seconded with

the Spirit's motions, they command their own entrance into the soul, the heart submits to the way that God revealeth for its good. The heart, like a quick, strong echo, returneth the full answer of gospel demands: Ps. 27:8, 'When thou saidst unto me, Seek ye my face, my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek;' Zech. 13:9, 'I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.' So much for the proof of the point.

I shall answer a doubt or two before I go on to the application.

The doubts are these:—

1. If the want of the Spirit's revelation be the cause why so few believe, how can God be just in punishing men for their unbelief, since he doth not give them all a like revelation?

I answer—Two ways: First, From God's sovereignty: Exod. 33:19, 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy;' so Rom. 9:15,16. God's will is the measure of his actions, as the moral law is the measure of our actions. That is a rule to us, not to God; he giveth no account of his matters, he acteth out of infinite sovereignty, and so he may do what he pleaseth Who shall set a task for him? Mat. 11:25, 26, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, because it seemed good in thy sight' That is the upshot of all, and the result of all disputes about it: 'Even so, Father, because it pleaseth thee.' He doth not tell you for what cause it pleased the Father; but even so it pleased him, as if that were reason enough: it is just because it pleased the Father. You are not to be judges of God's actions, but doers of his will. God made you not to censure him, but to give him glory. The pattern of all justice is to be copied out from God's will; it is just because God did it.

Secondly, The beauty of God's justice shineth in this, in that the positive cause of unbelief—

[1.] Is in ourselves, it being through our own blindness and stubbornness. We 'will not come to him that we may have life.' Hosea 13:9, 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.' God is the positive cause of faith, the privative cause of unbelief. The Spirit's revelation worketh faith; but in case of the want of it, our own perverse hearts are the cause of unbelief. If the earth be light, it is from the sun; but if it be dark, it is through the lack of the sun, that is from itself: 2 Cor. 4:3, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.' It is to those that take a course to ruin themselves.

[2.] Men do not their utmost, and therefore are justly punished, because they did not what they were able to do to get faith. He is justly condemned that complaineth of the length of the way, and therefore doth not stir one foot to see whether he shall conquer it, yea or no: Mat. 25:26, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant.' Many complain, as if God required brick and gave no straw. They are wicked and slothful; they do not what they should. Men had rather accuse God than reflect upon their own idleness; they will not come to him.

[3] They abuse their parts, and are so far from improving of them to the utmost, that they employ them against God: Jude 10, 'What they know naturally as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.' So 2 Peter 2:12, it is said, 'They utterly perish in their own corruption.' There is wickedness enough in them to cause the wrath of God to proceed against them. This is the first doubt.

2. The next is (which is somewhat answered out of this) if this be cause—viz., the want of the Spirit's revelation—Why then should we labour after faith? Our labour will not do without the revelation of the Spirit.

Ans. {1.} We should labour after it, to see our own weakness, that we may took up to God the more earnestly for it. Men think it is easy to believe till they put themselves upon the trial. They do not see a need of the Spirit till they perceive the fruitlessness of their own endeavours: 'If thou appliest thy heart to understanding, and criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hidden treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God,' Prov. 2:3-5.

[2] That we may manifest our obedience to God, and meet him in his own way, He hath commanded us to believe; let us do what we can towards it. Improve your natural abilities, and use the means that God hath appointed, and refer the success to him: Luke 5:5, 'Master, we have toiled all night, and caught nothing; nevertheless, at thy command I will let down the net.' Consider God's prerogative over you, and make the best of the power you have; and if for nothing else, yet at his command perform thy duty. God hath enabled you to do somewhat, and he may justly require you should do the utmost of it. Every man hath a command over his locomotive faculty; he can choose whether he will come hither or go thither. Every man can 'watch at the gates of wisdom,' Prov. 8:34, 'and wait at the posts of her door.' Therefore, let the command of God enforce you to do what you can.

[3.] That you may manifest your desires after it. God doth not give Christ to many, because they do not care for him. If a man did care for a thing, he would endeavour after it. Excuses are always a sign of an unwilling heart. Where the desires are vehement, they will not easily be put by: Mat. 13:45, The merchant that 'found a pearl of great price,' 'went and sold all that he might buy it.' Those that desire not Christ, do not look upon him as a pearl of price; if they did, their hearts would follow hard after him. Those that say they have no power, it is to be feared they have no heart. It was the slothful person said, 'There is a lion in the way,' Prov. 26:13. Therefore strive after faith, if for nothing else, yet to show that Christ is worth your most earnest seeking and pursuit after him.

[4.] Because though by the using of means we do not get faith, yet without the means we shall not have it. It is *conditio sine qua non*, though not *causa fidei*: Rom. 10:14, 'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' A man hath it not by hearing, nor for hearing, yet he hath it not without hearing. There is not merit nor efficacy in the means, and yet there must be the presence of them, because it holdeth negatively, if ye do not use the means ye shall never believe. The Spirit causeth faith, but it is by the word: see that text, Acts 13:46, 'It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto you; but seeing ye have put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.' Men that refuse the means, pass the sentence of condemnation upon themselves, they declare themselves to be those whom God will judge to be unworthy of eternal life—unworthy, because they would not seek after it. When the psalmist describeth desperate men, he represents them to be such as reject the means: Ps. 58:4,5, 'They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.' The adder stoppeth one ear with her tail, and the other lieth close upon the ground. So wicked men, if they come to the ordinances, take care they shall not prevail upon them; they are not diligent to attend to the word.

[5.] It is very likely God will come in and meet with us if we seek him in his own ways; and who would not venture upon a likelihood of safety to come out of a certain danger? If you do not use the means, you are sure to perish; if you do, you may be likely to obtain mercy; and certainly it is the safest course to adventure upon these hopes. The soul reasoneth in such a case just as the Aramites did: 2 Kings 7:4, 'If we enter into the city, there is the famine, we shall die there; if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come and let us fall into the host of the Assyrians; if they save us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die.' So if we continue in our sins, it is death; if we neglect

prayer, or hearing, or meditation, it is death; though there be but an *if* of mercy, venture upon it, a little to keep up the heart. Men near drowning will catch hold, though it be but of a reed or a twig.

[6.] This is God's usual way, to meet those that seek him. The God of Jacob would not have them seek his face in vain, Isa. 45:19, and Luke 11:9; though he would not arise and give as his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will arise and give him. When the soul is importunate with God thus, it is a sign of mercy, and it is through the preliminary efficacy of the Spirit. This earnestness after faith is the first impression of the Spirit's efficacy. Thus I have answered the doubts.

I shall now come to the application.

The first use is exhortation, to press you to divers duties; as—

1. To wait for the Spirit's motion and revelation. Do not look to the words that are spoken, but how the Spirit giveth you the savoury sense and meaning of them. They that were at the pool looked for the angel's stirring of the waters; so do you look for the Spirit's revelation, to see how the confusedness of your light and knowledge is done away. The mind knoweth some things, but doth not know things as it should know them. See how the Spirit giveth you satisfaction. If you would have faith, your chief care is to attend the Spirit; and therefore, faith is called by the Spirit's own name, 'the same Spirit of faith,' 2 Cor. 4:13, because it is the faith of the Spirit.

2. Yield to it. Many are of an unteachable heart, they are not won by the Spirit's allurements: Gen. 9:27, 'God shall persuade (or enlarge) Japhet to dwell in the tents of Shem.' God shall allure the allurable. Take heed you resist, not the secret whispers and persuasions of God's Spirit. There is a great deal of thwarting in the heart against it, that God's Spirit, when it should allure, it is forced to dispute it; and therefore God saith, Gen. 6:3, 'My Spirit shall no longer strive with men.' The Spirit convinceth us this is right, and then our interests and vile affections set the heart a-disputing against it; and we would fain put off these inward motions and checks of conscience. Many of God's elected servants do very often resist those motions, so that it were even just with God to cast them off, but that Christ's word is passed: John 6:37, 'All that my Father giveth me shall come to me, and I will in no wise cast them out.' But as to reprobates, God stayeth a great while with them too. *No longer*, implieth a long time, even as long as he shall think fit, and then he leaveth them. Take heed of these withdrawals.

3. Cherish it. Many have had strong resolutions, but they die away without this. They have a great many previous workings of the Spirit, as, much knowledge of the will of God, much sense of sin, fear of punishment, many thoughts about their freedom and deliverance, some hopes of pardon, some kind of care and desire; but then they drown these things again by the cares and pleasures of this world, and so they are to no purpose. This is called by the apostle ‘quenching of the Spirit,’ 1 Thes. 5:19. Now, the Spirit is quenched two ways:—

[1.] When they do not blow up the coals, stir up the graces of God that are in them, and labour to feed and cherish by prayer and meditation these desires, which is the strengthening of the things which are ready to die, Rev. 3:2; when we do not labour to rouse up ourselves, and keep in the heat and warmth in our souls: Mat. 13:19, ‘Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in their hearts.’

[2.] When they do as it were cast water on the Spirit’s motion by the return of their lusts. Men are apt to return to their old ways, after these partial desires and partial care to get Christ; but 2 Peter 2:21, ‘It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.’ Enraged lusts return the stronger, and have the greater force upon the heart.

4. In case you have it, praise God for it. Oh, get largeness of heart to conceive of this great privilege, to have Christ not only to be revealed to you, but in you! There is a threefold ground of thankfulness:—

[1.] In respect of yourselves, that God was not discouraged with your often resistance of him, but that he should go on with his work: Isa. 66:9, ‘Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth?’ God speaketh of the outward glory of his church, but it is also true of grace in the hearts of his servants. Oh, how justly might God have broken off and interrupted his design and purpose of grace and mercy, and have given over such a stubborn heart as yours to the sway of its lusts! As Elizabeth said, Luke 1:43, ‘Whence is this, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?’ So whence is it that the Spirit of the Lord should come to me, stubborn me? There should be such a reflection upon our unkindness.

[2.] In respect of the freeness of the gift, that he should give his Spirit to work faith in us so freely. Faith is expressed to be the gift of God, Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29, ‘To you it is given to believe,’ *umin ecarisJh*; you have it of the free grace of God. Flesh would fain boast, and have these things in its own power, but you see, ‘to you it is given.’

[3.] In respect of others. That he should reveal himself unto you, and not unto others. What did he see in you more than in others, that he should give you a token of his distinguishing love? Christ thanketh God for the distinguishingness of it: 'Father, I thank thee, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes,' Mat. 11:26. And therefore we have the greater reason so to do: John 14:22, 'How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' Thus you see what cause there is of thankfulness on this threefold account.

Use 2. Is examination, to see whether you have closed with the report of Jesus Christ or no. If you have closed with it aright, it is with the Spirit's revelation, it is because you have been inwardly convinced in your hearts of the truth of it. But how shall we know that we believe in the report because of the Spirit's revelation, and that many will say and everyone crieth it up for a truth, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners? I answer:—

1. The Spirit's revelations are distinct; it sheweth the soul how Christ will be received. Most men's knowledge of Christ is an indefinite knowledge; they know him in a confused, indistinct, indefinite manner; they look upon him as a Saviour, but they do not look upon him as commanding things contrary to their vile affections. Now the Spirit revealeth him determinately, what he is, and upon what terms we must take him.

2. It giveth men an experimental taste of Christ: 1 Peter 2:3, '*If* so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' They can speak of what sweetness there is in Christ. Notional knowledge looketh upon him as a man looketh upon a thing in the bulk. When a man hears a minister talk of Christ, he taketh it up as a great and comfortable truth, but he cannot speak out of experience. All Christians can speak out of their desires, though not delights: Oh, come, taste and see how good the Lord is!

3. The Spirit revealeth so as to influence us to obedience. Spiritual light is like that of the sun, it hath heat with it. But now it is otherwise with notional irradiations, and common illuminations; the heart is vain, and the conference conduceth to controversy, more than to the conversion of others.

Use 3. The third and last use is to condemn all that false faith that is in most people: they think they believe in Christ, whereas they scarcely believe the report of him. True faith hath a true ground. Most men have this in their thoughts, that there was such a person as Christ; the preachers tell them so; the laws of the land and the customs of the people are for it. Alas! most people are like wax, they are fit to take the stamp and impression of any religion that is bequeathed to them. They are not said so properly to believe, as to have a

superficial apprehension of the common report that is made concerning such a thing. They have no more saving faith in Christ than Turks and infidels, and have as little true love for him as the Jews that crucified him. I cannot examine every false ground. I will give you marks in general when you have it from any wrong ground; as—

1. When you take it up without weighing: Prov. 14:15, ‘The simple believeth every word, but the prudent man looketh well to his going.’

2. By your fickleness; when a man embraceth a thing upon wrong grounds, he will leave it upon wrong grounds: Gal. 1:6, ‘I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel;’ 2 Thes. 2:2, ‘I beseech you, brethren, be not soon shaken in mind.’

3. By the dissonancy of our practice, and inconstant resolutions. This is called, 2 Peter 2:1, a ‘denying Christ that bought us.’ Though they profess him in words, yet in deeds they deny him. It were better to renounce the profession of Christ than to keep it with these resolutions: Mat. 6:31-33, ‘Take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewith ye shall be clothed; for after all these things do the Gentiles seek; but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’

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